

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 BOYLSTON STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02116

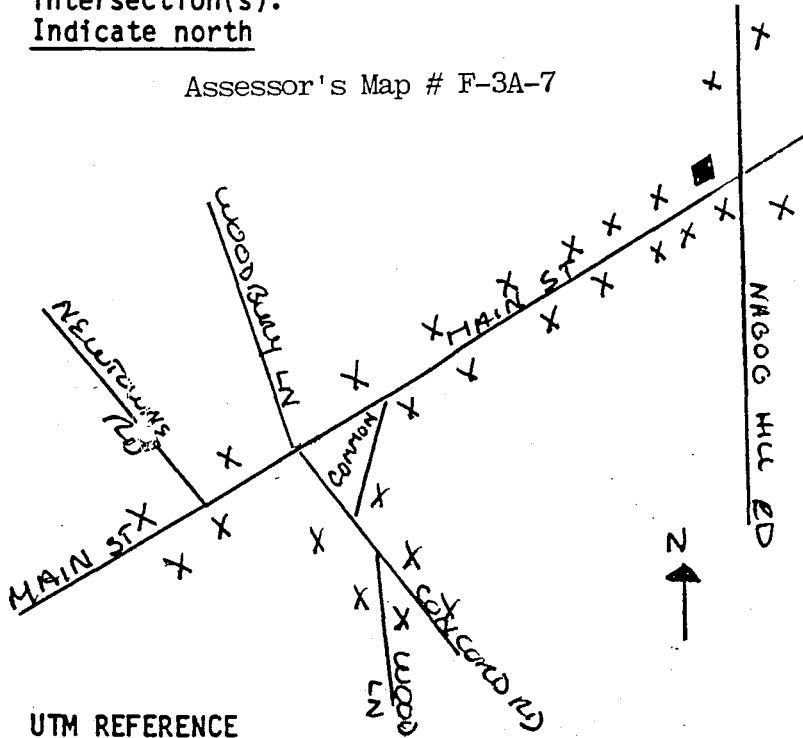
AREA	FORM NO.
B	84



in ACTON  
 Address 508 Main Street  
 Historic Name Dr. Harris Cowdry  
 Use: Present residential  
 Original single family residential  
 Description  
 Date 1830 / ca. 1850  
 Source Phalen / Nylander notes  
 Style Greek Revival / Italianate

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north

Assessor's Map # F-3A-7



Architect unknown  
 Exterior Wall Fabric wood clapboard  
 Outbuildings attached altered barn  
 Major Alterations (with dates) 1870s  
 Italianate changes - barn converted/altered  
 Condition good  
 Moved no Date n/a  
 Acreage less than one acre  
 Setting Northwest corner of Main St. and Nagog Hill Rd. - at edge of village district among mixed use 19th century buildings.

UTM REFERENCE \_\_\_\_\_  
 USGS QUADRANGLE \_\_\_\_\_  
 SCALE \_\_\_\_\_

Recorded by Gretchen G. Schuler  
 Organization Acton Historical Commission  
 Date March 1990

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER IN 1983 AS PART OF THE  
ACTON CENTRE HISTORIC DISTRICT

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE** Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Atlases / Birdseye, Maps: 1851, 1856, 1871, 1875, 1889, 1892.  
Fletcher, Acton In History, 1890.  
Phalen, History of the Town of Acton, 1954.  
National Register Nomination, MHC, 1983.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community:  ACTON	Form No:  B-84
Property Name: 508 Main St.	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION - 508 MAIN STREET

Situated on a corner the substantial 2 1/2 story, 5-bay house has two main facades with a 1-story ell that connects with the mid 19th century gable-front barn. Built on a granite foundation the house retains its wood clapboard sheathing. The chimney pierces the asphalt roof below the ridge on the east side. The Greek Revival form, of a 4-room plan with center entrance in the gable front, has been embellished with Italianate architectural trim.

The 5-bay, gable-front house has a center projecting entrance pavilion with double-leaf panelled doors flanked by 1/2 side-lights under which there are recessed molded panels. Windows have 2/2 sash and louvered shutters at the first story level, 2/1 with shutters at the second story. There are two 2/1 windows in the gable peak; one of which is missing its shutters. The plain projecting frames have molded lintels. Architectural trim of Italianate style includes the paired carved cornice brackets supporting the wide raking cornice and returns, and the transitional gable-front facade door frame with narrow raised panels that articulate the design of the side-lights, pilasters, and door.

The east facade, facing Nagog Hill Road, also has 5-bays with similar window configuration and a panelled center entrance door with transom lights. The central bay on the second floor is a smaller 2/2 sash than others and has a window box at the sill. A wrap porch ties together the two main facades. It has a hipped roof supported by turned posts and plain brackets.

The 1-story side ell has a tongue and groove vertical board door near the rear corner of the main house block and two 6/6 sash. The wide gable-front attached barn has been altered by the removal of the gable returns, the replacement of the barn door with a large overhead garage door, and the addition of a chimney. There is one 6/6 window in the gable peak.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community:  
ACTON

Form No:

1384

Property Name: 508 Main St.

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

HISTORICAL STATEMENT - 508 MAIN STREET

Acton Centre, once known as Acton Village, developed as the civic and institutional center of the large sprawling town which has several 19th century village centers. Acton Centre took on its suburban institutional form around an elongated Common from 1806 when the Second Meeting House was built and several local citizens bought surrounding farms and laid out house lots and built an hotel and some commercial buildings around the Common. The only industrial site was a shoe factory (no longer extant) opposite the Common. Most Acton industrial properties were located in South and West Acton due to the water power and location of the railroad in 1844 both of which bypassed Acton Centre. Subsequent development included the Evangelical Church, the Town Hall replacing the Second Meeting House, and finally the Library as well as many mid-19th century Greek Revival houses for artisans and professionals. Acton Centre is the approximate geographic center of Acton and appropriately remains the civic center.

Main Street has always been a main route through Acton serving as an early native trail and later a carriage route. From the early 1800s when Acton Centre developed into the civic center the section of Main Street from west of Concord Road to Nagog Hill Road was two carriage lanes separated by a long narrow greensward strip that was part of the Common. In the late 1800s Main Street was known as Elm Street for the rows of elms and other trees planted by the Committee established to beautify the Town Common. The 20th century highway improvement of Route 27 resulted in the shift of Main Street to a two lane road north of the Common.

Originally a 1 1/2 story cottage the house was built in 1830 by Dr. Harris Cowdry (1803-1875). The house changed substantially in size and detail during Dr. Cowdry's lifetime. The size was increased by 1850 and Italianate features were added in the 1860s or 1870s. Cowdry had moved to Acton in 1828 when he married Abigail Davis (1807-1886), daughter of Ebenezer and Abigail Davis. Besides practicing medicine Cowdry was involved in local affairs, served on many committees and as superintendent of schools, and was an active member of the Evangelical Church. The Cowdrys had two children, Arthur who became a physician practicing in Stoneham, MA and a daughter Helen who married Dr. Charles Little. Little practiced in Acton from 1866 until his early death in 1869. Helen Cowdry Little remained in Acton living with her mother in this house until 1886 when both women died. The early 1900s house owner was John White. In 1920 the late Mrs. White's home was sold to the Acton Women's Club for their clubhouse from 1920 to 1925. In the 1950s the Misses Lincoln and Torrey owned the property and ran "The Bantam Workshop", a crafts school for young children. From 1958 to 1974 the house was the rectory for Acton's Episcopal Church.

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